FTM Passing Tips

by Andy and many others

These tips may be freely linked to so long as I am identified only as "Andy" (no other names). Please send all updates, comments, questions, etc. to: *FTMpass@yahoo.com*

Please note: if you save the Passing Tips as text, the file is best viewed and printed in a monospaced font such as Courier in order for the ASCII drawings to appear correctly.

Contents

- Intro and Disclaimer
- Hair
- Body
- Chest
  - Swimming
- Clothes
- Wrist Watches
- Stuffers
  - Modifying Stuffers
  - Packing Methods
- Shoes, Socks, and Slippers
- Voice
- Mannerisms
- Bathrooms
  - STP (Stand to Pee) Devices
  - STP (Stand to Pee)-enabled Stuffers
- Conclusion
- Recommended Reading

Intro and Disclaimer | Back to top

Please keep in mind that these tips are just guidelines based on what has worked for myself and others - with experimentation, you can find out what works best for you and fits your personal style. The listing of a product here is not intended as a positive or negative endorsement that product.

Hair | Back to top

Hair is the most important place to start. Go to a barber's if you already feel comfortable trying one - if you don't, find a gay or gay-friendly hair stylist who's willing to help you look as masculine as possible. A lot of guys keep going to the person who cut their hair "before" - don't, especially if they perceived you as a lesbian. Even if you're not passing yet, get a new barber or stylist who'll help you to look male.

Go for a short-back-n'-sides cut, but avoid getting an all-over crewcut or "punk" style, as these are often sported by the butch lesbians who you are trying to distinguish yourself from. All-over crewcuts are also problematic because they emphasize the shape and size of one's skull and are therefore feminizing (look at Sinead O' Connor) - you've got to leave something on top. Ask for a "traditional men's cut" or a "traditional boys' cut," or tell them that you're in a play or going to a costume party and you need to look like a guy. You can take in a photo of a haircut that you like, or you can browse the Haircuts for Men site and ask for a haircut by name. For more information, see How to Tell Your Barber Exactly What You Want.

Comb the top of your hair back or to the side. As any MTF can tell you, bangs are feminizing - women and kids tend to have them, but men don't. Use gel or mousse if your hair won't stay in place.

Sideburns: You know those Liza Minnelli-esque "points" which grow just in front of the ears of women with short hair? Men don't have them, so cut them off straight across with a good pair of scissors. Then use a razor to square off your sideburns - start from the upper point where your ear meets your head and then go straight down.

Shaving: Many women have light-colored "peach fuzz," but men don't, so shave it off. Again, use a good razor and shaving cream, followed by aftershave. Shave your sideburns every day and your whole face as often as needed. Make sure you also shave your upper lip - a light mustache is actually far more likely to give you away than to help you pass. For shaving instructions, see How to Shave.

Fake Stubble/Facial Hair: Although really convincing fake facial hair from a theater or costume supplier might help you pass, it is *not* recommended. It's very difficult to explain where that full mustache suddenly sprouted from and even more difficult to remember who's seen you wearing it and who hasn't. If you still want to give it a try, click here for a reader's instructions for creating fake stubble.

Rogaine, supplements, herbals, etc.: Do **NOT** use Rogaine on your face - it won't work, and there could be serious side effects. It's designed to work only on peoples' heads. Supplements and herbal hormones are also potentially dangerous and could even give you liver damage. The only safe and effective way to lower your voice, masculinize your body, and grow facial hair is to take testosterone under the care of a doctor. Any other way is ineffective and potentially hazardous to your health.

Body | Back to top

Even if you are not on hormones, bodybuilding either in a gym or at home can make a difference in getting your body to take on a more male shape. Before beginning any workout program, make sure you are healthy enough to do so, and make sure that you learn the correct way to do the exercises so as to avoid injury. Trans-Health.com has helpful articles on fitness.

Chest | Back to top

While a flatter chest is an important part of presenting as male, it is important to know that binding too tightly and too long is not good for you. Make sure you give yourself breaks from binding, and try to avoid methods which cause back or rib pain, restrict breathing, or cause skin problems. For reviews of various binding menthods, see the Chest Binder Reviews web site as well as the Bustle.com article *11 Of The Best Binders You Can Buy, According To A Trans Person*.

You don't necessarily need to bind perfectly flat to pass, since how tightly you need to bind depends partly on what you're planning to wear. If you are wearing layers (T-shirt with woven shirt on top) and/or woven, baggy fabrics such as button-down shirts, you will need to bind less tightly in order to appear flat than you would under tighter, knit clothing such as T-shirts. If you need a break from tighter binding methods, you might want to consider wearing woven shirts more often than knit ones.

Binding with tape is not recommended as long-term solution, but if you try it, a reader suggests wrapping duct tape around a sports bra or undershirt. Never apply tape to bare skin - you could pull skin off along with the tape. Also not recommended are Ace bandages. Although they can really flatten you out, they can also cause pain, restrict breathing, and cut into your sides. They also tend to slip down easily. If you are having trouble affording a safer binding method (or if you have a used binder to donate), check out the Big Brothers Used Binder Program.

There are a number of better binding options available, and what will work best for you depends on your size and build. Keep in mind that commercial products designed for non-trans men may not come in sizes small enough to accommodate smaller guys. Finally, many binding options are more comfortable if you wear a cotton or Under Armour "Heatgear" undershirt beneath them or apply talc or Gold Bond Medicated Powder before putting them on.

For those wishing to avoid binding during the summer comes this suggestion from the Netherlands:

> "Wear a muscle-shirt or a T-shirt (a muscle-shirt, leaving your biceps and deltoids uncovered, looks nicer IMO), preferably not too loose, tucked in. Over that, wear a singlet (which I think [Americans] call a vest or tank top); make sure it's way way way oversized and not made from a stretchy material, preferably with a print or application at the front. It doesn't really bind, but for those of us who are not too large it sure beats hot sweaty tight uncomfortable binders! Also, if the vest has large armholes and is made from a loosely-knit or mesh-like material it's not much warmer than one layer of clothes."

You can make a homemade binder made using lycra cycling shorts or control top nylons (yes, nylons). The following method can be used by itself or to help keep a neoprene or elastic binder in place. Cut both legs off the shorts or nylons, and then carefully cut the crotch area out of the middle, making sure you leave the fabric around it intact. Cut the waist-band off too if you find that it cuts into you too much (it will ride up more without the waistband, though). Then turn the whole thing upside down - your arms should go through the leg holes, your head should go though the hole in the crotch area, and the rest (the waist area) should go down over your chest. Position your breasts down and out as much as possible. Hand wash the nylons with mild soap, line dry.

Another good option is a tight sports bra, available at any athletic wear store. These are very comfortable and work well if you're a "B" or smaller. Champion

make good ones.

Shapeshifters is a queer-run company which makes highly effective and comfortable custom-made binders in a variety of colors and patterns.

The trans-run company gc2b Transitional Apparel makes binders which a reader reports are good for guys with larger chests, affordable, comfortable, and okay to swim in. If your gc2b binder is itchy when it first arrives, the same reader recommends wearing it inside-out for a couple of days.

The company GC2 Compression features $19.99 T-shirts and tanks "specifically designed for men who suffer from gynecomastia (male breast)," which might also work for FTMs.

While the average sports bra doesn't have enough lycra (about 11%) to hold in larger chests, Title Nine Sports offers a product called The Frog Bra (Item #310900) which is made of 32% lycra and promises "maximum support and compression." It costs $32, and from what I've heard it works.

The custom-made, $75 ENELL Male Support Vest is especially designed to provide maximum compression for men with gynecomastia (enlarged breasts).

Under Armour's "Heatgear" undershirts are designed to wear under football and hockey pads, but they also make good binders for smaller guys and can greatly increase the comfort of other binders if worn as an undershirt beneath them. Their products are available in most sporting goods stores, so you can try them on first.

Underworks offers a variety of products, ranging in price from $19.99 to $36.99. They are trans-friendly, and if you call and let them know that you're FTM (as opposed to a non-trans guy with gynecomastia), they will help you decide which one would work best for you. *Calling first is important, since they tend to change their sizing occasionally.*

Note: Some longer binders tend to "roll up" on some guys. To prevent this from happening, either fold the bottom half back so it "doubles up" (which also provides extra compression), or sew a wide enough strip of fabric to the bottom edge of the binder to make it long enough to tuck into your trousers (see illustration).

The Loving Comfort Breast Binder comes highly-recommended by some larger guys. This product was originally made to stop milk production in nursing mothers, but FTMs report that it also does a great job of binding and is very breathable and comfortable.

Taiwan's T Kingdom™ offers binders which are designed to be "comfortable" and "as easy to put on as any shirt" and to "look good under other clothes." There are eight different models (a reader describes the 1700 as "fab"), and prices range from about $23 US dollars to about $61 US dollars. See their first time buyer's guide to determine which model will work for you. Please note that their products tend to be sized small, so you may need to go up several sizes from what you normally wear.

Morris Designs offers several "male garments," which I hear are very comfortable and effective.

Again, some longer binders tend to "roll up" on some guys. To prevent this from happening, either fold the bottom half back so it "doubles up" (which also provides extra compression), or sew a wide enough strip of fabric to the bottom edge of the binder to make it long enough to tuck into your trousers (see illustration).

The FTM-run Double Design Co. of Taipei, Taiwan offers a variety of binding and swimweaar products.

Some guys report success with Neoprene back braces and waist trimmers, which they trim to the appropriate size. They are available online and at sporting good stores and are less sweaty if worn over a T-shirt.

Many drug stores and medical supply stores sell abdominal binders, which some guys have had great success with. Elastic rib belts are also available, but they tend to be less comfortable and effective than abdominal binders. To order abdominal binders, try:

- Alpha Medical Products Inc.
- Tetra Medical Supply

Swimming | Back to top

You don't necessarily have to give up swimming prior to chest surgery. Underworks now make the swimwear, which has been getting good reviews.

Many guys have also been able to swim successfully by wearing a rash guard shirt (used for surfing) over a binder. Rash guards are available online at sites such as My Rashguards and from surf shops such as Quiksilver. If you're concerned about sunlight, Coolibar makes rash shirts which block 98% of UV rays and come in sizes XS to XXL.

Some guys report similar success swimming in a sleeveless Under Armour Heat Gear shirt worn over a binder. It's said that they dry quickly and hide binders well.

One reader reports swimming while wearing a "football jersy (mesh shirt w/holes) over a binder top that didn't bind too tight." Daniel recommends taking some cycling shorts, cutting the crotch out, and then turning them upside-down and putting your arms through the legs holes, your head through the cut-out crotch, and then the main part around your chest before covering it with a rash guard shirt (see above).

Clothes | Back to top

Once you've bound, you need the right shirt. In the cooler months, a plain white crew neck undershirt over your binder and beneath your shirt will help hide your chest, and that triangle of white showing beneath an open collar looks very masculine. For other shirts, knit fabrics often tend to cling too much, while woven ones (such as cotton and cotton blend button-down shirts) "bag" out better and hence help you look flatter. If you send your shirts to the cleaners, a good way to keep them from clinging is to ask for extra starch. Always try silk shirts on first - depending on the cut of the silk, it can either work well for you or cling too much.

As for patterns, busy prints, checks, plaids, or horizontal stripes are good because they distract the eye from the topography beneath them. A vest (waistcoat to you Brits) over your shirt can also help hide your chest.

If you live in a cosmopolitan area where there are a lot of butch lesbians then it's going to be much more difficult for you to pass. One way to help distinguish yourself from them is to dress more conservatively - you might want to leave the leather motorcycle jacket at home for a while.

Start with an ironed button-down shirt (loose, to help hide your chest), worn with pressed khakis, dress slacks, or neat-looking blue or black jeans. I've also heard that Dickies brand, 100% cotton casual wear shirts work well, especially in hot weather. Eddie Bauer 100% cotton wrinkle resistant shirts are also recommended. In the summer, you can avoid the androgyny of T-shirts and cut-offs by pairing short-sleeved button-down shirts with khaki shorts.

Ties are of course a great way to pass, although there are many situations where you'll look too out-of-place in one. Also, when buying shirts to wear with ties, keep in mind that your neck size will increase once you're on hormones. Here's how to tie a tie.

Make sure your trousers fit low and aren't tight - this helps to hide both your hips and your waist. Pleats can either help hide your hips or emphasize them, so use your judgement. If you do decide to wear pleated trousers, make sure that the pleats lie flat. A dark brown or black leather belt is also a nice, masculine touch. If you're short, avoid double-breasted suits. Don't spend a lot of money on new suits and jackets at this point - you'll bulk out of them once you're on hormones. Instead, find a good used clothing shop to buy them at.

If you're looking for new clothes in smaller sizes or boys' size suits, try:

- Boys Italian Suits (online and Brooklyn NY)
- ForTheFit.com (online only)
- Heritage House (Miami, FL and mail order)
- Jockey Club Ltd. (online and Santa Ana, CA)
- Simon & Sons (Needham, MA)

European and Asian-based clothing stores often carry mens' clothing in smaller sizes:

- H&M
- Primark
- UNIQLO
- Zara

For custom-made suits, try Indochino. For custom-made dress shirts, try BestCustomShirt.com.

You can order jeans and khakis with shorter inseams from the following merchants:

- Land's End (free custom hemming down to a 26" inseam)
- J Crew (down to 26" inseam for khakis only.)
  NOTE: J. Crew waist sizes tend to run big, so your usual size trousers may be loose on you

NOTE: 3. Crew waist sizes tend to run big, so your usual size trousers may be loose on you.

- Eddie Bauer (down to 20" inseam)
- The Gap (down to 28" inseam)

Also check out the sites the Modest Man and Short Shrifted - A Clothing & Style Guide for Short Men.

Wrist Watches | Back to top

If you have small wrists, be sure to wear a watch that's properly proportioned and doesn't make them look even smaller. Some of my favorite smaller watches are:

- Seiko 5 SNK series - Fun, inexpensive watches that come in a variety of styles and colors. Most are 37mm.
- Seiko SKX013K1 - A 38mm, 200m depth-rated dive watch at a reasonable price.
- Skagen 233XLTTN - A 37mm dress watch with a beautiful blue sunburst dial.
- Timex Marlin - Great retro 1960s styling in this reissued 34mm dress watch.
- Timex Weekender - Classic 38mm watch that features an Indiglo night-light, easy-to-change straps, and a variety of styles.
- Victorinox Original - Iconic design featuring 100m water resistance and a variety of dial and bezel colors. Be sure to get the 39mm version and not the XL one.

For more information on watches, see the Modest Man's 25 Watches for Small Wrists and Top 25 Small Automatic Watches (Under 38mm).

Stuffers | Back to top

First, be realistic when you stuff! The vast majority of non-porn star men are "grow-ers" rather than "show-ers," which means that their penises get up to twice as big when erect as they are when flaccid. The average guy is about 2-4 inches long when he's not aroused, and the goal of stuffing is to look natural, not like you're walking around with an erection.

There are a number of products available to simulate the look and feel of non-trans male equipment in your trousers, including one you can make yourself using unlubricated condoms, hair gel (always use no-alcohol hair gel and "double-bag" the condoms to prevent leakage), and nylons.

There are many comfortable, realistic, inexpensive cyberskin and silicone stuffers on the market. Please note, *these products are not all the same,* so investigate them carefully before deciding which one to get. See Links page for vendors and also Show Me Your Package, an informational sheet on packing/STP resources.

One issue with cyberskin stuffers, however, is that they're built in a way that makes the smaller-sized dicks stick outwards significantly. As a results, some guys feel that such stuffers them look conspicuously excited/over-endowed. To counteract this problem, you can wear it with the dick hanging to one side instead of directly in front of the balls. Non-trans guys often do this - it's what the tailor means when he asks you if you dress "right" or "left." It might also help to order your cyberksin stuffer in a darker color, since apparently stuffers made from darker material lay flatter after you've had them a while. You can also make a cyberskin stuffer stick out less by modifying it (see below).

Tyron's is a German-made soft silicone prosthetic which attaches with adhesive and is available in a variety of pigments.

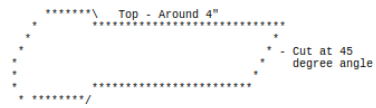
Made by a professional prosthesis maker, The FTM Prosthesis comes in 15 skin tones and can be held in place (apparently for several days) with a special glue so that you can wear it without underwear. It is said to look great and feel fairly realistic and comes in three sizes. The newest model is the Dual Prosthesis, which can be used for both daily wear and sex.

You can save money on adhesive for your FTM Prosthesis if you buy BT-401 Secure Medical Adhesive from Factor II, Inc. If you need to remove your FTM Prosthesis, make sure that you use Factor II's B-208 Pros-Aide Adhesive Remover to avoid accidentally tearing it. You might also be able to find medical grade adhesive and remover at your local costume or theatrical supply store.

Modifying Stuffers | Back to top

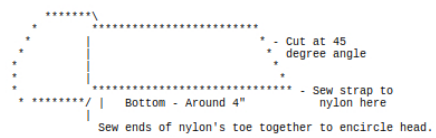
To modify a cyberskin stuffer to keep it from sticking out too much: Use a scissors to cut the dick part off at a 45 degree angle, starting from the top (see illustration). Then tie the dick in an unlubed condom to keep it from gathering lint and drop it in your briefs - the underside cut will make it "hang" realistically. I recommend using a medium-sized cyberskin stuffer for this, as the increased girth makes up for the discarded balls as long as you're not wearing something skin-tight like spandex or a Speedo.

> Modifying a cyberskin stuffer:



To modify a cyberskin stuffer to wear on a strap under swim trunks or boxers: Use scissors to cut the dick part off at a 45 degree angle, starting from the bottom (see illustration). Tie the dick in an unlubed condom to keep lint off. Place dick in a knee-high nylon, sewing the ends of the nylon's "toe" together so that the line encircles the head (see illustration). Then sew the nylon to an elastic waistband (you can buy elastic at a fabric store, or just use the band from an old pair of underwear). The topside cut will make it "hang" realistically. Again, no one will notice the discarded balls if you're not wearing something skin-tight.

> Modifying a cyberskin stuffer to use on a strap:



From Tucker comes the following suggestion for putting a foreskin on your modified cyberskin stuffer:

> "Drop the head of the penis into the nylon's 'toe' as usual. Fit it snugly. Twist and/or sew closed at the base of the penis, but do not cut off the excess nylon. Instead, roll the nylon back down to the head of the penis so it functions as a second, looser skin. Cut it off an inch or two beneath the head of the penis (keep in mind that the nylon foreskin may shrink). If you want a non-retractable foreskin, sew it closed, or partially closed, around the head."

If you want to add balls to a modified cyberskin stuffer, try the following suggestion from a Passing Tips reader:

> "With your modified softie, you do not have to sacrifice balls. After dropping your softie into the condom, just tie on a pair of jelly balls (also in a condom) to the end. Drop the whole thing into a nylon, dick first. Wrap nylon around dick base, separate balls, and pull through your wrap around base, then you can slide the whole thing back into what is left of the nylon, (I use the kneehighs). This makes a nice tidy package."

Some guys find that a cyberskin stuffer can be irritating to wear against their skin. A reader offers the following solution:

> "... keep the balls in a sock, with just the shaft and medicine spoon sticking out. The sock tucks between [your] legs ... and the tip still looks right when [you] pull it out to pee. The cotton against [your] parts keeps everything dry and clean."

Packing Methods | Back to top

If you're having trouble getting your stuffer to stay put in your briefs or you want to wear boxers or swim trunks with it, there are both homemade and commercial products available for keeping it in place. A reader recommends David Archy Micro Modal underwear, which has separate pouches for the shaft and balls.

Shoes, Socks, and Slippers | Back to top

Footwear can be a real problem if you have small feet, although you do save money if you can wear boys' athletic shoes. The best place I've found to look for shoes and slippers is Zappos.com, which allows you to search by size, style, color, and price. If you wear a size 6 or smaller, you'd do well to search in both their Men's collection and their Youth Boys' collection.

Other places to look include Famous Footwear and the boys' sections of department stores. If you're a vegan, Payless shoes are usually made from all man-made materials. Boots from Army Navy stores often go down to small sizes, and Dr. Martens come in sizes as small as a UK 3 (US boys' 4½) and also add about an inch to your height. PacSun sell sneakers down to a boys' size five. Florsheim make nice dress shoes in smaller sizes, as do Stacy Adams.

If you're interested appearing taller, the Richlee Shoe Company, Don's Elevator Shoes, and Constep Elevator Shoes make smaller shoes with built-in lifts, and Airsole Elevator Insoles can be placed in any shoe. Don't spend too much money on shoes, though - your feet will grow at least a size once you're on hormones.

Socks: Men tend to wear white socks only with athletic shoes, so stick to dark socks with other shoes. If your feet are too small for mens' dress socks, wear boys' size 9-11 socks, and, if you can't find any boys' dress socks you like, the women's ribbed trouser socks at Banana Republic made good dress socks (don't worry, no one will know you're cross-dressed :-). For smaller athletic socks, discount stores sell very inexpensive 10-packs of boys' white socks.

Voice | Back to top

Women tend to use an upward inflection at the end of their sentences, while men tend to speak in more of a monotone.

Mannerisms | Back to top

Women tend to be less obtrusive, while men tend to take up more space. If you watch commuters on a bus, women tend to sit with their legs crossed and their arms drawn in, and men tend to sit with their legs apart and their arms out.

Handshakes: Make them firm, not like a dead fish. Lock your thumb into the other persons hand, and look them in the eye. Don't pump excessively.

Bathrooms | Back to top

FTMs are actually fairly fortunate in this area because men are far less observant and social than women - they usually just go in, do their business, and leave. Just march calmly in, use the stall, and march calmly out - if you rush around nervously you'll be far more likely to attract attention. Don't talk to anyone, don't make eye contact, and whatever you do, don't try to look at anyone's dick. Remember, even non-trans men have to sit down sometimes.

You do **not** need to be able to stand and pee in order to pass, but here are some ways to do so (it's best to practice naked in the shower until you get the hang of them).

STP (Stand-to-Pee) Devices | Back to top

Disk: Take a large coffee can lid and trim the edges off (you can keep it in your back pocket or wear it beneath your underwear band next to the skin if you like). Roll the disk into a funnel shape for use. Be sure to get it far enough back, behind the urethral opening, and hold the tip downward. Don't press it against yourself, as this can cause spraying.

Hollow Plastic Measuring Spoon: These are used for giving medication to babies and are available at pharmacies for a few dollars. Cut the top of the handle off at a 45 degree angle, so that the tip points downwards when the spoon end is up against you. Hold the spoon end against you, making sure you get a good seal around the urethral opening, but don't press too firmly, as this is unsanitary and can cause spraying.

Shampoo Bottle: Take a Head & Shoulders-type bottle and cut the bottom off at a 45 degree angle. Use the top as an STP device.

There are also some commercially available urinary devices.

STP (Stand-to-Pee)-enabled Stuffers | Back to top

For an informational sheet on packing/STP resources, see Show Me Your Package.

Conclusion | Back to top

Finally, a very large part of passing is sheer confidence and bravado. If you really believe you're a man (which you are) and project this belief to the rest of the world, it will go a long way towards also convincing others. Any difficult feature you might have (high voice, smooth face, small shoulders, wide hips, lack of height, etc.) is one that some non-trans men have also – there are even non-trans men with enlarged chests (male gynecomastia).

Recommended Reading | Back to top

The *FTM International newsletter* is available as a downloadable PDF (requires Acrobat Reader).

Lou Sullivan's *Information for the Female to Male Crossdresser and Transsexual* has helpful information on everything from passing to surgery.

The book *Dagger* contains a chapter on FTMs and a useful chapter called "Packing, Pissing and Passing."

For dealing with paperwork, name changes, etc., Dallas Denny's *Identity Management in Transsexualism* is very helpful.